2: Lee T-5 (1855-1858) 1957
NO6 Comanche NO6

361 acquainted, and a description of it in this place will suffice for all. It consisted, I should say, of four hundred tents, and covered a space of six or seven acres. In the center of the village was a capacious square, perhaps one acre, and in the center of the square stood a lodge, the largest in the town, being the business tent of the civil chief. Around the square the wigwams were arranged with great particularity. Leading into it on the four sides were regularly laid out streets, the tents standing in line on both sides. Those of [354] the principal men were the largest, and fronted the square; those of their inferiors, according to their rank, diminishing in size, and extending backwards.

342 The tents are constructed of prepared buffalo skins, the flesh side outward, and, from a distance, an Indian town like this, to the eye of a white man, is novel and attractive. The manner of their construction is as follows: Poles, from ten to twenty feet in length, are driven diagonally into the ground in the line of a circle, at the distance of three or four feet from each other, and at such an angle that their tops will nearly meet. These poles serve the purpose of rafters over which the buffalo hides, firmly sewed together, are drawn and fastened by stakes on the ground, thus forming an impervious cone. The door does not turn on hinges, but is simply an extra pelt, fastened at the top, with a heavy weight at the bottom, and which, when raised or turned aside sufficiently to admit an entrance within, falls directly and closely to its place. Around the outside is dug a narrow and deep ditch, rendering the floor dry and hard, [354] and the smoke of the fire, which is always kindled in the center of the wigwam, escapes through a hole at the apex.

361 These villages are always located near running water, and in thinly timbered groves, which break the force of the

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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342 eighteen to twenty for the Crow tipi.[38] For the purpose of lodge-making, the hides of old buffalo cows, just shedding the winter coat in April or May, were preferred. These hides were supposed to be the easiest to tan, possibly, it is said, because the old cows were then thin in flesh and their hides thicker and hence more easily worked. The average tipi was twelve to fifteen feet in diameter across the floor. The height from the center of the floor to the peak was approximately the same as the diameter of the floor.

The tipi was tilted slightly backwards. The smoke-hole near the top, above the entrance, was made by folding the skins back or attaching flaps in such a way as to give the appearance of the lapels on a man's coat. Each flap was adjusted by means of an attached outside pole. By moving one or both of the poles, the prevailing wind could be shut out, and at most times a draft of air could be created to carry off the smoke from the fire directly beneath. Thus the smoke-
● [354] hole and flaps served somewhat like a chimney.

The door, which always faced the rising sun, was simply an opening three or four feet high, covered by an extra pelt, tanned stiff. It was fastened either on the windward side or at the top, with a weight attached to the bottom. Either method provided a self-closing door.

The covering was staked down, but in warm weather it was not completely drawn to the ground, an air space of several inches being left all around. This space, together with the opening at the top, provided perfect ventilation. In cold weather the covering could be drawn completely to the ground. To keep the continual draft blowing in all around the bottom of the tent from striking those inside, a buffalo skin lining, in later times called a "dew cloth," was fastened to the lodge poles from four to six feet above the ground. The lining hung down inside the poles and was tucked under the edge of the bed. Consequently the air coming in under the outer covering was deflected upward by the lining and never struck the occupants directly. The lining also prevented rain entering the smoke-hole from falling on the bed and provided insulation against the penetrating summer heat. A very small fire was all that was necessary to provide warmth even in extremely cold weather. A narrow ditch around the outside kept the floor dry.

[38] Lowie, *The Crow Indians*, 87.

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
.NO6 Comanche NO6

Food, Clothing, and Dwellings

Compared to a good tipi, the shack of the frontiersman was a poor makeshift. The tipi shed wind and water and was warm and well ventilated. It could be set up within fifteen minutes and could be struck in less time. In hot weather the cooking was done outside. Actually, during much of the summer and autumn little shelter was really needed. In the permanent camp a brush arbor was often erected in hot weather, under which the entire family or groups of families found refuge from the summer heat. The roof was flat and made of leafy boughs supported by posts seven or eight feet high. The sides were left open to permit full benefit from the breeze. Most Comanches today, even those who have substantial houses, build brush arbors in their yards for lounging and summer sleeping. (There are no bedbugs in the arbors.) Arbors of hooped saplings reminiscent of Shoshone wickiups were also used.

Some owners painted their tipis with a number of encircling stripes and with geometric designs on both the lining and the outside cover. The average tipi, however, did not have the added touch of the artist.

The furnishing of a tipi was like all else in Comanche economic life—simple and highly adapted to mobility. Devices for comfort were a comparatively modern innovation, since it is inconceivable that in the days when the Indians were foot travelers and carried most of their possessions on their backs they would load themselves down with luxuries. In the center of the tipi a round hole was dug for the fire. It has been contended that the only difference in a Kiowa and a Comanche camp was in the fire-hole. The Comanches made their fire-hole about fifteen inches in diameter, while the Kiowas made theirs about two feet.[84]

Before the arrival of the white man, the Comanches produced fire by means of the fire drill. The method consisted of hand twirling a hard stick, held vertically in a hole in a horizontal block of softer material, until the heat ignited the Spanish-moss tinder or birds' nests packed about the hole. Fire drills were kept in cases of buffalo horn, called *na'a:*. Flint and steel for fire-making were among the first articles introduced by Mexican traders. After the introduction of gun powder, the Comanches found that a fire could be started more quick-

[84] Marcy, *Adventure on Red River*, 57.

7: Richardson D-4 (no date) 1929
NO6 Comanche NO6

342 The Comanche tipi represented a wonderful combination of utility and portability. A dozen or more slender poles were tied together at the top and set up so as to form the frame-work of an irregular cone of such diameter as the material at hand and the size of the family made practicable. This framework was covered with buffalo hides, flesh side out, and offered excellent shelter, while an opening and flap at the top assured ventilation. The flap could always be adjusted so that the opening was protected from the prevailing wind on the same principle that ventilators on our modern buildings are constructed so as to shift with the wind. Recently the writer spent a hot August evening in a Comanche tipi constructed along traditional lines except that canvas rather buffalo hides served for covering. There was no smoke and the place was comfortably cool, notwithstanding the small fire in the center. Close examination re- [354] vealed the fact that the covering was not drawn completely to the ground, but that instead an air space of several inches was left all around. This, together with the opening at the top, made for perfect ventilation. Had the night been cold, the canvas could have been drawn completely to the ground, thus sacrificing ventilation to comfort.

648 The Comanches were a nomadic people and as late as 1850 a 619 wandering band might be found in the valley of the Platte or in [361] the plains of Durango, fifteen hundred miles further south. There was not a single Comanche tribe, but rather several distinct tribes, having but few relations the one with the other. The Penatekas, were the southernmost band or tribe and are most often heard of in the history of Texas. Occasionally they got in touch with the northern bands when the latter came down to the Brazos or Clear Fork to spend the winter or when some of the young men of the different bands, joined perhaps by their allies the Kiowas, put out for the Mexican border for a joint raid. Sometimes the Penatekas [578] were even in a state of war with their northern kinsmen. Naturally when the chiefs of a given band made a treaty it was binding only on their immediate followers. Hence, their kinsmen who lived afar off were likely to ignore it even if they should hear of it. Furthermore, the nomadic habits of the Indians and the resultant divisions and subdivisions of the bands into small parties away from responsible leaders made it impossible for the chiefs to control their

20: Wallace H-4,5 (1945) 1953 NO6 Comanche NO6

to hear the echoes, and one boy asked his mother to make him a bed in the fireplace that he might look up the chimney at the stars. Only 27 Comanche families were living in houses in 1886, and in 1901 the majority of the 3,713 Indians of the reservation lived in tents, tipis, and in small boxed houses along the streams. Water was obtained from running streams and bedding was filthy; there were no screens on the houses, no toilets, and no effort was made to have clean, wholesome food.

After allotments were made, home building increased rapidly. The Indians received payment for their ceded lands and realized that they must cease to wander. White neighbors soon had homes on the tracts they had taken and this stimulated a desire on the part of some families to imitate. It has been stated previously that whites who leased Indian lands for a five-year period were required to erect and leave a three-room house on each allotment. Each year new houses went up; in 1930 twenty-one were built at an average cost of $1,636.22. By that time 90 per cent of the Indian families had good frame homes with sanitary toilets and other outbuildings.[22]

The homes compare to an advantage with the rural homes of white neighbors. Superintendent Buntin in his 1930 report estimated that the value of home furniture averaged slightly more than $300. A few Comanche homes presently are large and clean, are beautifully carpeted and furnished, and have running water, gas, electricity, and occasionally a good library. Since 1930 few families have lived in tipis or tents. But partly due to the depression and later war-time restrictions and partly due to the increasing number of landless heirs, home construction has not kept pace with the increase in the number of families. Since young married couples no longer have land and lease-money, they tend to live with parents.

The Extension Service has sought to improve the standards of home life. It enrolled 525 new members in Indian wo-

22. Buntin, *op. cit.*, MS. II, 50, 51.